June 18, 2024 / EU ELECTION FALLOUT

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SCORING <Soaring Inward - Beets Version >

NOEL KING (Host): Earlier this month, voters in the 27 E-U countries turned out to choose who would represent them in parliament.

NOEL: And far right parties did very, very (very) well.

NOEL: Italy’s far-right leader Giorgia Meloni accepted flowers and sang the national anthem

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=14e6481b7db0dcee&q=giorgia+meloni+elections+national+anthem&tbm=vid&source=lnms&fbs=AEQNm0Aa4sjWe7Rqy32pFwRj0UkWZJPk1C9buWu--tLPKEpSxLqGfZiWMqdk6VF37sVUbkfuZLTj2oNC7EnrW0kOrs5_OmipJdVTNqNxrP1hxJXbQ_y65N5cXbtQ7HA0GJils8bEjOH7UdKHMyAqI2qHK8jyCVlTKr2HZzSgiLRk_TjD_i8-oOktyVsn75IgqYT_LeUsyb-cfXGD_xxHYUpBP_x5YS5_2g&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiJhpDQm-WGAxUwFFkFHdBMCucQ0pQJegQIChAB&biw=1549&bih=806&dpr=2#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:1a9616f7,vid:ZjufsEUsHB4,st:0)*> SINGING IN ITALIAN*

NOEL: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spread the blame.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.dw.com/en/scholz-alarmed-by-far-right-gains-in-eu-vote/video-69325996)*> Olaf Scholz: “The results were poor for all three governing parties. None of us should continue on with business as usual.”*

NOEL: And France’s centrist leader Emmanuel Macron went buck wild —>

*<CLIP> Emmanuel Macron: “This is a serious and weighty decision…*

NOEL: ← dissolved France’s parliament and called a snap election that he cannot lose, but that he might lose.

NOEL: Coming up on Today, Explained: Macron’s gamble and how the far right got Europe’s youth vote.

[THEME]

SOPHIE PEDDER (Reporter, Economist): My name is Sophie Pedder. I am the Paris bureau chief for the economist.

NOEL: You also wrote a biography of Emmanuel Macron.

The book is called Revolution Francaise. Emmanuel Macron on the Quest to Reinvent a nation. It's a biography of the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

NOEL: What happened when the European Union held parliamentary elections earlier this month and that led to Macron making a big move in France?

SOPHIE: So what happened was that voting on June the 9th across the European Union. So that's in every single one of the 27 member states led in France to an absolutely crushing result for Emmanuel Macron's party. And after suffering pretty humiliating results at European elections, he took a decision which concerns only France and that is to hold a snap parliamentary election in France for the French National Assembly. And to everyone's absolute astonishment.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.france24.com/en/video/20240609-macron-s-call-for-new-elections-caught-the-room-by-surprise)*> FRANCE 24: There were gasps in the room when Emmanuel Macron announced.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxIP7OkdrLo)*>BBC: Even for a man with a penchant for the theatrical, he married his drama teacher, remember – Macron stole the political limelight this week, dissolved Parliament snap elections.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.france24.com/en/video/20240610-unexpected-bombshell-macron-calls-snap-legislative-elections-in-france)*>FRANCE 24: earthquake, bombshell, uh, whatever, uh, you want. Clearly this was not predicted…*

It was unexpected because he didn't have to call an election. It doesn't affect the presidency at all. So Emmanuel Macron remains president. He could have continued with the outgoing parliament, but he decided that he would take a gamble and test whether or not people really meant it when they voted the way they did.

NOEL: Why did Macron make this move?

SOPHIE: Well, nobody really knows what's in his head.

SCORING IN <QUESTION TIME\_APM>

My best guess is two things. One is that he thought that possibly the bad result he suffered at European elections was just a protest vote, and that he felt that he wanted to test that and see whether people really, when they were confronted with proper domestic policies and manifestos, that's what they really wanted for the daily government of France. And the other explanation is that he's thinking ahead. He's looking ahead to 2027. That's when his own mandate as president comes to an end. He cannot run again under the Constitution. And he's very worried at that point that the far right Marine Le Pen might be elected. And the idea under this sort of theory is that let's see what they're like. If you're going to take a risk with the far right, let's see what they like in government for three years. You know, he thinks he's trusting the French to make the right call, but they may be making a call that doesn't suit him. And that is part of this gamble he's making. And, you know, he's playing in a way, the sort of long term card of trying to save France in 2027 from the far right, against the short term risk that it could put the far right in power, as early as July 7th.

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SOPHIE: Well, I think he is a risk taker. That is very clear. We've seen that in the past – in my book, I actually looked it up in the index I used the word risk 54 times in my book about him. So you know he created a party from scratch. Everyone said it wasn't possible. He ran for the presidency before having ever run for any other electoral office, and that paid off for him.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99elMIGJcBg)*> ABC NEWS: Centrist candidate Emmanuel McCrone appearing with his wife, celebrating a decisive victory over the far right's Marine Le pen.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHOypvwTNEk&t=16s)*>: CNN: What we have done for months and months now has no precedent nor equivalence. Everybody told us it was impossible. But they didn't know France!*

That is in his nature. He he he's perfectly willing to take a risk. It's just that this one, the stakes aren't just about his future, they're about France's future. And I think that that makes it a quite different sort of gamble, even by his own standards.

NOEL: What are the stakes of this huge gamble?

SOPHIE: Well, basically, he –Emmanuel Macron – risks ending up being president of France, at a time when his own government could come from the far right. There are two extreme blocs that are doing well at this election so far, according to the polls. One of them is the far right under Marine Le Pen, and the other is the far left, which has come together to form a sort of alliance with all of the left wing parties, but whose manifesto is also pretty, pretty extreme.

SCORING IN <CURIOUS QUERIES\_APM>

So, you know the polls, for what it's worth, suggest that it's one of those two parties that's going to end up, gaining the single biggest number of seats in Parliament, possibly not a majority, but then would be in a position to form a government. So try to imagine the French president who represents the center. You know, he's really thought of as one of Europe's great sort of liberal centrists. He created this huge movement from scratch going back to 2017 and surprised everybody with with his ability to get to the presidency at this first try, this great centrist president ending up having to govern. You know, that's why the stakes are so high. Radical program, extremist politics, and potentially quite a lot of instability.

NOEL: Without asking you to predict too much, how is this gamble likely to work out for him? Any sense of that yet?

SOPHIE: Well, it's very difficult. France has this unusual two round system. So you have candidates who will stand in the first round and then you, unless one of them is elected with over 50% of the vote, in which case he, he or she is elected to Parliament straight out. It's extremely difficult to project, even from voting intentions, what the outcome will be in terms of seats. I think at this point, the best that we can say is that will probably be no party that has a majority, that there is a hung parliament, and that therefore you haven't resolved anything because Macron currently runs a minority government and you'll see the beginning of of perhaps weeks of instability, trying to see who could get together with you in order to form a government.

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Either way, it's not going to look pretty, and it's not going to be, the makings of a sort of stable time for France, unfortunately.

NOEL: What do you think explains French voters moving toward the far right and embracing or voting for this National Rally party?

SOPHIE: I think the answer to that has changed over time. What you've seen this year is Marine Le Pen take over a party that used to be very clearly an anti-Semitic, far right, xenophobic outfit that was founded, co-founded by her father. Now what she's tried very hard to do and, you know, with a certain degree of success is, is make it presentable, make it respectable. She wants it to be a party that people don't feel ashamed to say they're voting for. And to give you an example of that, when she, she secured, 89 deputies in the legislative elections in 2022,

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.france24.com/en/video/20220619-marine-le-pen-s-national-rally-estimated-to-win-89-seats)*>: FRANCE 24: The crowd behind me started shouting for “Marine.” I was looking to see if perhaps, arrived there waiting for her. I had to come and give what's going to be a pretty big victory speech. I can imagine this is a huge result. It's hard to emphasize just how much no polls predicted this projection.*

And she led them into parliament. She told the voters to dress smartly, to wear suits and ties, to not put a foot wrong, to not say anything, that was going to call her party into disrepute. And that has has helped her. You know, there is no way that you can really dispute the fact that she has managed to persuade lots of the French that she's not, like her father, that the party has changed and she's also focused on other issues. Obviously, part of what she what she is about is, is traditional far right worries and obsessions about immigration, national identity and those sorts of identity issues. But she's also focused very heavily on cost of living, on, increasing salaries, on people's concerns about paying their bills at the end of the month. So I think she has taken the party out of a place, that it used to be and made it a more sort of. It's still a populist party, but it's it covers a much broader set of issues and therefore appeals to a much broader set of people.

NOEL: The National Rally also has a a young leader, right. We always think of Marine Le Pen, but there is in fact a much younger, a much younger man involved here. Can you tell us about him and what appeal he might have to French voters?

SOPHIE: You're absolutely right.

SCORING IN: <A Dolphin Most Serious \_BMC>

Now his name is Jordan Bardella. He is he's got family origins in Italy. So he is in fact himself someone who is second generation immigrant in France. He's 28 years old. He's pretty much never held a job outside politics. He went into local politics very young, dropped out of college and went into local politics for the for Marine Le Pen's party. And she's really taken him under her wing. He's risen very fast. She handed over the reins of her party to him a couple of years ago. And he's he's a very slick operator. He's, smooth talking, he's calm and debates. And what he's very smart at is using social media. So if you look at his TikTok, account, he has massive following, at least by French standards.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@jordanbardella/video/7380044097509199136?lang=en)*>: @JORDANBARDELLA (French): Soyez libres, soyez français, et rappelez vous une chose, quand le peuple vote, le peuple gagne.*

And he is, you know, he's very he's very relaxed. He comes across as likable in these videos and these clips.

<[CLIP](https://www.tiktok.com/@jordanbardella/video/7377881422121504033?lang=en)> *@JORDANBARDELLA* Allez voter, allez voter, allez voter….

If you ask people on the streets when I've been doing my reporting for these elections, people often say he looks like a nice guy. And I think that's what brings, that's that's the value that he brings.

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He was raised in social housing and he has, you know, sort of made him made what he can of the opportunities that he had. And he gets a youth vote that is quite stiff, surprising, among. Yeah. Among young French people.

SCORING IN <DISCOURSE\_APM>

NOEL: Yes. And in fact, there seems to be some amount of evidence, Sophie, that younger French voters, at least in this election, were propelling the move toward the far right. Is is Jordan Bardella? Is he enough to explain that?

SOPHIE: I think he's done a lot to persuade people that this is not the party, the original far right party that it once was. Because – partly because he doesn't carry the name Le Pen. You know, I do think that matters. It means that people don't quite associate him with, you know, the father figure of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which still carries stigma. He's from a different generation. He talks and behaves like, you know, ordinary people. He seems like one of them. And I think that really, he really has been an asset to Marine Le Pen in, in persuading people that this is a new era, that the kind of page has been turned and this is not the far right party of the past. What what you need to remember is that, you know, behind the scenes, there are still a lot of those old timers hanging around on the on in the sort of outer circles of the, of the National Rally. So, you know, he is the presentable face of it, but it doesn't mean that the old timers have entirely disappeared at all.

NOEL: Sophie Pedder of Leading Magazine The Economist. Coming up: why young people in France embraced the far right.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

NOEL: Today, Explained, I’m Noel King. In those June 9th E-U parliament elections, the far-right National Rally party got 30 percent of France’s youth vote. Thirty percent! This lead to all kinds of headlines asking whether the France’s shift to the right is being lead by young people.

NOEL: Not content to speculate we called Gilles <ZHEEL> Paris <pah-REE> , a columnist on foreign affairs for LeMonde, to ask him if the kids are alt-right.

GILLES PARIS (Columnist, Le Monde): There are maybe two possible explanations for it. The first is that young people are very, let's say, sensitive to anti-elite rhetorics because they find it harder to get a foothold in their working life.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kd7V4vufef8)*> ARTE.TV DOCUMENTARY: There's a lot of inequality, a lot of injustices. We're all not treated the same. I find it unacceptable that I can go to work, be proud of my work, having the pride of providing for my family and still not be able to make ends meet.*

GILLES: Unemployment level is always higher, for them. And, Rassemblement National, National Rally used this rhetoric extensively to denounce the parties that have come to power from both the right and the left. The second possible explanation is that the Rassemblement National has succeeded in the racist and anti-Semitic excesses of its longtime leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDoBv_qEGgc&t=1s)*> EURONEWS: The ex-leader of France's far right foreign National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has been fined €30,000 for repeating his claim that the Nazi gas chambers in World War Two were a detail of history. He was convicted for contesting crimes against humanity on the same day, he was fined for making comments about Roma people.*

GILLES: The father of Marine Le Pen.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tsh9p5H-g5k)*> MARINE LE PEN: I will bring back France's sovereignty in all areas, which means the freedom for the French people to decide for themselves and defend their interests. I will control immigration and reestablish security for all.*

NOEL: Marine Le Pen's father was not on the right side of history and World War II, a time when it was very important to be on the right side of history. And yet, Gen Z, you say they don't seem aware of that. They don't seem to be associating her and her father, maybe as closely as anyone would have thought. Does Gen Z not understand the trajectory here?

GILLES: Well, the fact that Marine Le Pen broke with her father, that she expelled him from from the party he founded, and the fact that she changed the name of the party was a way to make distance between her and him. And for young people, coming to the age of of voting, well, they don't look that far in the past, and they take, Marine Le Pen, position on the kitchen table issues. And that's that's what is important for them.

NOEL: The president of the National Rally is a young man. He's 28 years old. I wonder if that appeals to young people at all. Tell us about this guy.

GILLES: Yeah. So Jordan Bardella is a is an invention of Marine Le Pen.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVQ2J_181SA)*> @NEXUSTRTWORLD: (CHANT: JORDAN JORDAN….) Jordan Bardella is young, popular and described as far right. He leads the National Rally Party along with his mentor, Marine Le Pen.*

GILLES: Plus, he had the advantage of coming from the north of Paris, which is well known for its number. It's nine three in French we say neuve trois.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WSZU7JxeAA)*> CNN: Far from the glamor of Paris, this is what the French call the Banlieue: suburban towns made up of tower blocks that are synonymous with poverty, crime and exclusion.*

GILLES: And Marine Le Pen was able to see his potential.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kd7V4vufef8)*> ARTE.TV DOCUMENTARY (VO:) Le Parti de Marine Le Pen. Marine Le Pen’s party Found ways to communicate with the youth. With Jordan Bardella, we entered the TikTok era and other social networks.*

GILLES: He Is a kind of a perfect son in law material, clean shaven, cool, a kind of Ken, if I may say.

NOEL: A Ken!

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKO84c6SbfY)*>: (SONG)…Baby I’m just Ken….*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVQ2J_181SA)*> NEXUS: He's strongly anti-immigration and anti-Islam, both of which he blames for the rise in crime in France and he’s anti-European Union.*

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.tiktok.com/@jordanbardella/video/7376691786934177057)*> @JordanBardella VO: Emmanuel Macron's government offers a whole range of free care to people who come to France, who have never worked, who have never paid and who are here illegally. I think this is unfair and I think it is unworthy of our pensioners and our fellow citizens who are no longer able to cope. I have to take responsibility on this subject to put an end to social immigration.*

GILLES: The platform is that Macron is a president who is not able to have authority to bring security to the people, to control immigration.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgs5IGO402Y)*> FRANCE 24 ENGLISH JORDAN BARDELLA VO: This is a clear message sent to Emmanuel Macron to European leaders. And it shows that our country is determined to see the European Union change, to move towards more democracy, more protection, more respect for the people of Europe.*

NOEL: On immigration, you say this is an issue of real concern to young people. What's the concern and what's the promise from the National Rally?

GILLES: The main message is take back control.

SCORING IN <NEUTRAL APARNA\_BMC>

Even if the European Union plays a great role in controlling immigration. The this immigration card is not new. You may have heard about Le Grand Replacement, a very controversial theory.

NOEL: Oh. Great Replacement.

GILLES: Yes. Great Replacement. It was forged by a French novelist in the 70s.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3J4r74YlCZE)*> CBS NEWS: This theory essentially argues that minorities and or immigrants are usurping white people of their political and economic primacy in Western society.*

GILLES: They make a connection between immigration and unemployment. And since unemployment improved under Emmanuel Macron, it insists vigorously on a new connection between immigration and insecurity.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.facebook.com/hnaftali/videos/france-has-fallen/1455932511830460/)*> HANAYA FATALI (FACEBOOK): This is France right now, thanks to the mass immigration policy of Europe. (RIOTS SOUNDS)*

GILLES: And the wave of riots which occurred last year.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn02haWVzVM&t=25s)*> NEWS9 LIVE: Is France experiencing its own black lives matter, and George Floyd moment? France is currently in the throws of unrest after a police officer shot and killed 17 year old”*

After a French young man was killed trying to escape the police was, of course an asset for Rassemblement National.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.facebook.com/hnaftali/videos/france-has-fallen/1455932511830460/)*> HANAYA FATALI (FACEBOOK): France is waking up. But it might be too late. The decades of European kindness and welcoming refugees is showing its results today.*

SCORING OUT

NOEL: You also mentioned unemployment and the economy. Talk a bit about the platform of this party and what they're promising there. This is a this is a tricky thing for any party, right. So what are the promises being made?

GILLES: The trick is the two words: Preference National. Which is national preference. Basically it gave the idea that jobs would be given priority to French people. And when I say French people, it's living here for a very, very long time. Not the one who received the French citizenship two, five, six years ago.

NOEL: Do you young people in France who were attracted to this party – do they have concerns BEYOND immigration?

GILLES: Maybe they have a critics on the way politics is done, and they may have an appeal for strong leaders.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngbPc58VxOg)*> BBC NEWS: There's been a definitive shift to the right. So in Austria, the Freedom Party. Top of the pile, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, taking seven seats this time around. Marine Le Pen in France a record 32% of the votes. The AfD in Germany…*

SCORING IN <Walls to hold us>

GILLES: You know that in Europe, one of the Prime Minister Marine Le Pen is very close to is Viktor Orban from Hungary. It's a country where there is a kind of authoritarian regime.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omfcUiba8b8)*> EURONEWS: Hungarian PM praised the French politician for defending Hungary on several occasions in the European Parliament, saying the political right needs to be renewed, which can only happen if they ally with each other.*

GILLES: What we can say about the the Rassemblement National is that in the past it was only a protest party, if you will, a party to express your dissatisfaction toward the way France is going, the way society is, is doing. So people are trying leaders. And today they are saying, “We’ve tried almost everybody except the Rassemblement National. So lets try it.” But it doesn’t mean that people will stay with Marine Le Pen for a very long time.

NOEL: This episode was produced by Denise Guerra with help from Victoria Chamberlin and Hady Mawajdeh, edited by Miranda Kennedy, fact-checked by Laura Bullard and engineered by Andrea Kristinsdottir and Patrick Boyd. I'm Noel King and this is Today Explained.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]